

Around Town with the Town Manager #4

The Evergreen Report cost the taxpayers \$28,000 and is a central theme of my thoughts and actions as Town Manager. The full report including its recommendations can be found at <http://www.colchestervt.gov/misc/EvergreenFinalReport.pdf>. People need to become familiar with it. Today, I am going to give an update on several of the report's recommendations – specifically numbers 2, 13, & 25.

“Developing and implementing a plan for creating and validating a community vision” is recommendation #2. The Town is fortunate to have a citizen advocate like Tom Mulcahy, the Chair of the Planning Commission. He has taken responsibility with Select Board approval to spearhead the task of developing a process for townspeople to define a vision for Colchester. Tom has named this task the “Heritage Project.”

Working with Sarah Hadd, the Director of Planning & Zoning and me to define the steps necessary to start such a project we have met with a number of people familiar with creating visions for (other) communities. They are Peter Clavelle, the former mayor of Burlington and member of the Legacy Project; David Coates, the former co-chair of the Champlain Initiative; Betsy Rosenbluth of the Orton Foundation; and Susan McCormick of Everyday Democracy.

As a result of meeting with these people we learned that such a task can cost from – \$30,000 to \$50,000. Money the Town does not have. Tom approached the Colchester Community Development Corporation (CCDC) whose directors are Maureen Garofano, Greg Dirmaier, Kevin Marchand, Jack McSweeney, Mike Mazza, and Moe Germain – all either citizens of Colchester or Colchester business people. These directors met with Tom, Sarah and me along with Dick Paquette, Chair of the Colchester Select Board to hear our request for financial support of the Heritage Project. As a result of these discussions the Town was given a grant of \$27,000. Recommendation #2 is now on its way to fruition. The next step is to find a community facilitator who can lead the project in facilitating our citizens to define a vision for our Town.

Why are we spending this amount of money on a “vision”? Over the past ten years that I have been Town Manager there has been little consistency in the overall direction of the Town. Without a vision the Town lacks a sense of identity. By defining a vision, our goal is to gather insights from key stakeholders like the Select Board, community members, community organizations, town employees and citizens to determine an image they would like the Town to embody. From this the Town will be able to develop a strategy to work towards the “embodied vision” – Recommendation #3!!! In the near future I will be asking citizens to volunteer for a multiple year commitment to help the Town develop this vision and strategy. It's time to turn “love of this community” into personal efforts to sustain its future.

I want to thank Tom Mulcahy for the extraordinary amount of time he has voluntarily given to the Town to research and develop a process to get the Town ready to hire a facilitator to

take the Town on its next steps to develop a vision that embodies the Town's future. I would also like to thank publically the Board of Directors of the Colchester Community Development Corporation for contributing a substantial sum of money to support this effort.

I am also happy to report as of June 1st, the Building Facilities Division has been successfully transferred to the Department of Public Works from the Town Manager's Office, Recommendation #13. Additionally, the Public Works management staff has been increased by one person with the transfer of Anja Twite from the Town Manager's Office to the Department of Public Works. She will be the Facilities manager and Administrative Coordinator providing financial tracking, project development support, public relations and records management services for the Department. She is working closely with Bryan Osborne, the Director, attending all staff meetings and visiting the Town Garage to learn the operations of the Department along with receiving training to oversee and supervise buildings maintenance, Recommendation #25.

In closing I do want to thank those people who have corresponded with me about these articles. I enjoy hearing feedback from you. Next week's column I will be introducing a new topic that is of major importance to the Town and every citizen. Its acronym is "TIF" – Tax Increment Financing. As will be explained over many weeks both in this column and other media this complex tax program is offered by State law for municipalities to pay for expanded infrastructure (roads, water storage capacity and lines, bike paths and sidewalks) necessary for community growth.

Al Voegele
Town Manager